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ABSTRACT

Major issues confronting private schools for exceptional children are identified by Charles J. O'Malley, a U.S. Department of Education official. These issues include: identifying the private education community, federal and state cutbacks in education funding, the federal role in education and the continued existence of the Department of Education, parental choice or parental rights, identifying exemplary secondary school programs in both public and private schools, the coexistence between private and public education, strengthening teacher education programs, review of teacher credentialing procedures, minimum competency programs for students, review of compulsory attendance laws, and review of curriculum requirements. Activities that were designed to promote coexistence between private and public education include: a Department of Education sponsored conference at which 120 public and private school representatives discussed block grants, governance, and Public Law 94-142; regional conferences for public and private school administrators; an effort by the Department of Education to better understand private education issues of concern to Fundamentalist and Evangelical groups; and the Department of Education's series of informal get-togethers (Koffee Klatches), which have involved representatives of public and private agencies. (SEW)

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[MAJOR ISSUES CONFRONTING THE NATION'S PRIVATE EDUCATION COMMUNITY]

Charles J. O'Malley

Being with NAPSEC is always a pleasure. During this past year I've had frequent chats with Sally & Susan concerning several issues of mutual concern. Both have always been forthright, honest, candid and fair in representing you to the federal government. I assure you they have had considerable impact - as has CAPE - upon many of the policies of the Department.

On January 22, 1982, I had the pleasure of describing to you the role of the Office of Private Education. Those of you were present that day may remember that auspicious day in my own personal career - the day on which I was officially sworn in as Executive Assistant. Certainly, a great deal has happened since that day. Today, a little over a year later, Sally and Susan have asked me to address what I see as some of the major issues confronting the nation's private education community.

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The nation's private education community. An interesting term.

Let me first say that one of the major issues is to IDENTIFY the nation's private education community. Events in Lewisville, Nebraska; Bangor, Maine; Billings, Montana, and the possibilities of problems soon emerging in Colorado, Maryland and Virginia - all contingent upon the definition of a valid or legal private school - point out the need for state and private school leadership to address this issue. Conversations with members of your board yesterday and today indicate that NAPSEC itself may encounter this issue in the future. Your efforts in

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conducting your state survey - e.g., how many states license or accredit private schools move in the same direction.

To most of you here today, the impact of federal and state cutbacks in education funding certainly is a major issue. The resultant competition for the funds between - and among - private and public educators - has, in many cases, created or heightened friction.

This issue of parental choice or parental rights - an issue to which you in special education are so sensitive - is extremely important. Cases in point - Special education's reactions to the Departments' efforts to change P.L. 94-142 regulations which some felt would impinge on that choice. In the same vein is the Administration's tax credit proposal, which will provide parents of low and middle income the opportunity to send their children to private schools. Another example of the emphasis on parental choice is attention being given to tuition vouchers as evidenced by the first report of the Advisory Panel on Financing Elementary and Secondary Education, entitled TOWARD MORE LOCAL CONTROL: FINANCIAL REFORM FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION, and a voucher proposal currently being explored by the Administration. Also, there is rapid growth in home instruction, wherein parents forego both public and private schools.

Considerable discussion is being directed to the federal role in education - and the continued existence of the Department of Education. Many educators would strongly prefer to see the federal role strengthened - as opposed to the Administration's posture of turning back control to state and local agencies. Some advocate that over 1/3 of the education budget be provided by the federal

government. Stronger federal roles in monitoring programs, civil rights compliance, etc., are advocated. NAPSEC has, I believe, taken the position that the Department of Education be retained.

There are several other issues which are being identified by various advisory councils, such as strengthening teacher education programs, reviewing teacher credentialing procedures, minimum competency testing for students, changing compulsory attendance laws to compulsory EDUCATION, reviewing curriculum, and identifying exemplary secondary school programs in both public and private schools. Let me bring you up to date on this important activity.

A little over 2 weeks ago, Secretary of Education Terrel Bell announced a program whereby outstanding or exemplary secondary schools would be identified and honored. In that press release - unfortunately not picked up by many media - was reference to private school involvement in that program. There will be a separate effort to identify and to honor private secondary schools. Presently, our plans - developed in concert with Bob Smith of CAPE, the National Commission on Excellence in Education and the National Institute of Education (NIE) - call for convening a very broad-based committee of private school representatives, who will develop criteria and procedures for the selection process. This committee hopefully will be comprised of representatives from NAPSEC, NAIS, NCEA, Seventh-day Adventist, Hebrew Day Schools, Quakers, Lutherans, Episcopal Schools, the 3 major groups of Christian fundamentalist, Evangelical Schools and the Alternative Non-traditional schools. I'm sure Sally and Susan will keep you apprised as we move forward.

The last major issue is one about which I spoke to you last year - one of the priorities of our office - is that of COEXISTENCE - coexistence between private and public education. To that end, the Department has convened a series of informal get-togethers (5, thus far) which, in order to maintain the relaxed climate I believe essential to such an effort, we have called Koffee Klatches.

Representatives of National Association of Elementary School Principals, Council of Chief State School Officers, Education Commission of the States, National Conference of State Legislatures, National Association of State Boards of Education, National School Boards Association, National Parent Teacher Association, Council for American Private Education, National Association of Private Schools for Exceptional Children, National Association of Secondary School Principals, National Association of Independent Schools, United States Catholic Conference, National Catholic Educational Asscciation, National Conference of Seventh Day Adventist Schools, National Society of Hebrew Day Schools, Accelerated Christian Education, American Association of Christian Schools, National Association of Episcopal Schools, Association of Christian Schools International, National Association of State and Federal Program Administrators and Citizens for Educational Freedom have come together, in the Secretary's conference room, for some very exciting and enlightened conversations. We've discussed tuition tax credits, Pastor Sileven's problems in Nebraska, how to improve the relationship between public and private education, as well as other matters of mutual concern. We've had representatives of the Pennsylvania and New York Departments of Education and the Florida Association of Academic Non-Public Schools describe the relationships between public and private education in their states. We've tried to identify some of the commonalities within these states - those ingredients such as strong

state associations, people on the state level responsible for private school liaison activities, state commissioners interested in establishing positive relationships with private education, and private school leaders vocally supportive of public education. The results, to date, have been interesting. The chemistry - fascinating.

Several of the leaders of national public school groups have come into my office with the question "What is our hidden agenda in convening these sessions?" - and when they're assured that all we're after is the opportunity to sit, drink coffee and chat a little, so we can get to know a little more about each other - so that we can associate a face with the name of an organization, they agree with the worthiness of continuing. Last month, some members of the National Forum of Education Organization Leaders - a group of 25 or so of national public school organizations expressed their concern over their colleagues' participation in the sessions. I've heard, from different sources, that several of our public school participants strongly defended the Koffee Klatches.

After our last session, earlier this month, the executive director of one of the major public school groups called me, offering to help in promoting the ideal state public/private relationship. That director, Bob Smith (CAPE) and I are meeting next Wednesday to explore possibilities. The President of one of the fundamentalist Christian school associations planned to call one of the public school groups to work out a resolution to the Nebraska problem.

Some other activities designed to promote a attitude of coexistence in which our office has been involved include:

1. A national conference last May hosted by our Office, at which 120 public and private school representatives discussed block grants, governance and P.L. 94-142.

2. Regional Conferences held in New York, San Francisco and Atlanta for public and private school administrators. The session in San Francisco dealt with a broad range of educational issues very similar to those you are addressing here. The Denver and Seattle regions are planning conferences to be held in late February and April, respectively.

3. A concerted effort by our office and OSERS - spearheaded by Tom Irvin - who'll be speaking to you shortly, the Office of General Counsel, the Office of Elementary/Secondary Education and, most importantly, NAPSEC, USCC, NCEA, representatives of 4 state private school organizations, Bill Schipper (National Association of State Special Program Directors) and Rae Levis (President, National Association of State & Federal Program Administrators), and subsequently, representatives from 5 state departments of education - to review P.L. 94-142 regulations as they apply to private schools - with the intent of clarifying the regs vis-a-vis private school children participation.

4. CCSSO's identification of several private school issues - with the emphasis on cooperation and a subsequent meeting of representatives from CCSSO, CAPE and our office.

5. Presentations by myself and/or staff (all 2) to groups such as NAESP, National Association of State and Federal Program Directors, NCSL, National Forum of Education Organization Leaders and the National Coalition for Public Education, wherein we discuss how we can stay away from further conflicts between the 2 sectors of education, which only serve to hurt the children we're trying to help.

6. In an effort to better understand the whole gamut of private education, we've addressed Fundamentalist and Evangelical groups such as Accelerated Christian Education, the American Association of Christian Schools and the Association of Christian Schools International. Outgrowths of those presentations were interesting. For example:

   a) The AACS president is encouraging his state associations to join private school groups, and, where possible, without relinquishing any autonomy, to work with state and local agencies. That's quite a change.

   b) Paul Kienel, executive director, Association of Christian Schools International, at the December Koffee Klatch, suggested that the Department convene a meeting of state private school liaisons, state-CAPE representatives and key national public and private school leaders, in order to discuss how we can stay away from Nebraska - type situations.

   We're working on that right now.

This may be a good time to reiterate what I view as major issues facing the private education community:

1. Identification of the nation's private education community - or governance.

2. Parental choice or parental rights as opposed to the interesting term used by Dr. Thorne yesterday - PARENS PATRIAE

3. The federal role in education - and the continued existence of the Department of Education.

4. Strengthening teacher education programs.

5. Reviewing teacher credentialing procedures - a governance issue which I believe will have a profound impact on private education.

6. Minimum competency programs for students.

7. Review of compulsory attendance laws.

8. Review of curriculum requirements.

9. Identification of exemplary schools.

10. Coexistence.

11. Impact of federal and state cutbacks.

Perhaps my approach to these issues sound Polyannish - naivete' at its best - because there are so many characteristics - so many factors - distinguishing private education from public education. But, I don't believe that I am being a Polyanna - nor that I am being naive, in encouraging people of different opinions to sit down together, to get to know one another, and to learn the sensitivities of one another.

I strongly believe that it's essential that we try to understand each other - even if we don't agree with each other. We do this continuously in our daily lives. Why can't we do it professionally? To me, this is the only way we can effectively address these issues I've just sketched for you.

Before I introduce Tom Irvin, let me again say thanks for inviting me to your conference. May it be a productive one.